

## Disputation LIII: National Identity is an Elevating Force in Society

Dear Peucinian Society,

Last week's resolution: *All Atheism Leads to the Crisis of Nihilism*, failed with a vote of 14 nays and 8 yeas. This was one of the best disputes of the year. The evening began when the lights were suddenly turned off and Sam Smith read under candlelight the monologue of Nietzsche's "madman" in front of the Society crying that "God is Dead!" Thespian Wesley Hartwell then read Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "if there is no God" then, "all is permitted" rejoinder. After dividing the society between the "children of Nietzsche" and the "children of Dostoyevsky"--we had several sober moments of reflection on the mayhem, brutality, and brilliance that has struck the German and Russian civilizations since those quotes were read in the late 19th century.

First-year Tobias Nickel from Germany stood up with a striking argument-- the truth-seeking atheist must tragically conclude that atheism leads to nihilism and the rejection of all moral ideals. The core of his contention was that without some kind of divine validation of the transcendent importance of one's task on this earth, human beings are bound to live a life of Sisyphean absurdity-- all becomes play. He argued that we have lost the bearings that oriented societies for thousands of years and this amounts to an unparalleled spiritual catastrophe, a loss of any criteria for objective truth, and a biological self-image of aimless evolution. The society was perplexed deeply by the fact that Mr. Nickel, a self-proclaimed atheist, argued that atheism destroys all spurs to truth, despite the fact that he himself was seized by an admirable and insatiable will-to-truth that he could not explain.

Melanie Tsang contended that atheism does not lead to ethical relativism and the instability of truth and meaning. She counterposed the Greek belief in the power of the intellect to the religious claim that all morality has its origins in faith. She then proceeded to argue for a secular Kantian morality based on the idea every individual should find meaning for his or herself. Those who took her side either affirmed platonic rationalism, some version of ethical existentialism, or contended that the idea that people cannot be moral or happy without religion was a delusional piece of religious propaganda.

This week, we will turn to a topic that is currently dividing the West-- the question of national identity. While almost all westerners came to reject the USSR, there were two different strains of thinking about what went wrong-- issuing forth from the dissidents and the patriots. The dissidents came to argue that the reason the USSR was so wicked was because it was a form of faux-universalism and they struggled against Soviet Communism in the name of a European universalism that scorned national identity as a petty and at times belligerent distraction from the work of building a global civil society based on the protection of human rights, saving the environment, and helping third world countries. The "patriots" came to argue against the USSR on the grounds that it was a neo-imperialist project that denied cultural singularity and particular national identities in favor of a spread of homogenous Marxism with a centralized economic bureaucracy. Contemporary debates about the European Union, the Middle East, and post-colonial politics remain divided between the dissidents who reject national identity and the patriots who affirm it. Where do you stand?

**Resolved: National Identity is an Elevating Force in Society**

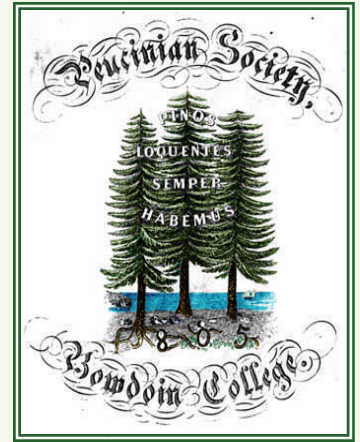
**Affirmative: Chad Attenborough '12**

**Negative: Hannah Lorastein '13**

Thursday, February 25, 2010, Massachusetts Hall Faculty Room, 7:30 P.M.

Sincerely,

The Peucinian Society Council



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